

**CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN DIEGO REGION**

**MONTHLY
MANAGEMENT

NOVEMBER 2003**

December 10, 2003

APPENDED TO EXECUTIVE OFFICER REPORT

CONTENTS

Significant NPDES Permits, WDRs, and RB Actions—Dec. 10, 2003

**SIGNIFICANT NPDES
PERMITS, WDRS, AND RB ACTIONS**

12/5/03 7:03 AM

DATE OF REPORT	ACTION TYPE	APPLICATION COMPLETE	DISCH./RWQ LIMITS KNOWN	Monitoring Requirements and Plan	COMPL DRAFT	PUBLIC REV. & COMMENT	BOARD HEARING & ADOPTION	Consent Calendar Item	COMMENTS	Staff
DECEMBER 10, 2003										
NAME OF PERMIT/WDR/RB ACTION										
DECEMBER 10, 2003 MEETING										
AT RB OFFICE SAN DIEGO										
TOT. MAX. DAILY LOAD--SHELTER ISL. YACHT BASIN SAN DIEGO BAY--DISSOLVED COPPER	Hearing: Basin Plan Amendment	NA	100%	80%	80%	80%	December 10, 2003	No	Conduct public hearing	Dobalian
CITY OF ESCONDIDO--INTERMITTENT WET-WEATHER DISCHARGE TO ESCONDIDO CRK.	NPDES Permit Renewal	100%	100%	100%	100%	80%	December 10, 2003	No	NPDES Workplan for FY 2003-04	Ott
CITY OF SAN DIEGO CONVENTION CENTER DISCHARGE TO SAN DIEGO BAY	Hearing: CDO Revision	NA	NA	NA	100%	80%	December 10, 2003	No		Phillips
COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO SAN MARCOS LANDFILL	WDRs Update	100%	100%	100%	100%	80%	December 10, 2003	No	Rev. WDR for Class III Landfill closure	Tamaki
FEBRUARY 11, 2004 RB MEETING										
RIVERSIDE SANTA MARGARITA RIVER MS4 STORMWATER PERMIT REISSUANCE	Hearing: MS4 Permit Reissue	100%	100%	100%	90%	0%	February 11, 2004	No	NPDES Workplan FY 2003-04	Quigley
TOT. MAX. DAILY LOAD--SHELTER ISL. YACHT BASIN SAN DIEGO BAY--DISSOLVED COPPER	Basin Plan Amendment	NA	100%	80%	0%	0%	February 11, 2004	No	Consider adoption of Basin Plan Amendment	Dobalian
TRELLIS PROJECT--FIFTH AVENUE CONDOS DEWATERING DISCHARGE SAN DIEGO BAY	Approval of Mand. Min. Penalties	NA	NA	NA	100%	80%	February 11, 2004	No	MMP for \$6,000 for 2 effluent violations	Melbourn
CITY OF OCEANSIDE OCEANSIDE OUTFALL DISCHARGE PACIFIC OCEAN	Approval of Mand. Min. Penalties	NA	NA	NA	100%	80%	February 11, 2004	No	MMP for \$9,000 for 3 effluent violations	Stewart
LAKE CUYAMACA RECREATION AND PARK DIST. REC. AREA NEAR JULIAN SAN DIEGO CO.	New WDRs	90%	90%	90%	90%	0%	February 11, 2004	TBD		Bryan Ott
ALLIED WASTE--OTAY ANNEX LANDFILL CHULA VISTA	WDRs Revision	100%	100%	30%	10%	0%	February 11, 2004	Yes		McDaniel
COUNTY OF ORANGE--PRIMA DESCHACHA LANDFILL	WDRs Revision	100%	100%	30%	0%	0%	February 11, 2004	Yes		Grove
MARCH 10, 2004 RB MEETING										
2003 TRIENNIAL REVIEW OF BASIN PLAN	Hearing: Resolution	NA	NA	NA	50%	25%	March 10, 2003	No	Conduct public hearing	Ebsen
CITY OF ESCONDIDO HALE AVE. WATER RECYCLING FACILITIES PROJECT	WDRs Update	80%	75%	80%	80%	0%	March 10, 2004	TBD		Bryan Ott

**SIGNIFICANT NPDES
PERMITS, WDRS, AND RB ACTIONS**

DATE OF REPORT DECEMBER 10, 2003	ACTION TYPE	APPLICATION COMPLETE	DISCH./RWQ LIMITS KNOWN	Monitoring Req'tments and Plan	COMPL DRAFT	PUBLIC REV. & COMMENT	BOARD HEARING & ADOPTION	Consent Calendar Item	COMMENTS	Staff
APRIL 14, 2004 RB MEETING										
RIVERSIDE SANTA MARGARITA RIVER MS4 STORMWATER PERMIT REISSUANCE	Consider Permit Adoption	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%	April 14, 2004	No	NPDES Workplan FY 2003-04	Quigley
NATIONAL STEEL AND SHIPBUILDING CO. SAN DIEGO BAY SEDIMENT CLEANUP	Hearing: CAO	NA	50%	50%	0%	0%	April 14, 2004	No	Conduct hearing	Carlisle
SOUTHWEST MARINE SAN DIEGO BAY SEDIMENT CLEANUP	Hearing: CAO	NA	50%	50%	0%	0%	April 14, 2004	No	Conduct hearing	Carlisle
2003 TRIENNIAL REVIEW OF BASIN PLAN	Resolution	NA	NA	NA	0%	0%	April 14, 2004	No	Consider adoption of resolution	Ebsen
VAN OMMERING DAIRY, LAKESIDE	New NPDES Permit	90%	100%	90%	90%	0%	April 14, 2004	No	NPDES Workplan for FY 2003-04	Phillips
MAY 12, 2004 RB MEETING										
GEN. WDRS / POST CLOSURE MAINTENANCE INACTIVE NON-HAZ. WASTE LANDFILLS	New WDRs	NA	100%	60%	30%	90%	May 12, 2004	TBD		Grove
GEN. WDRS / POST CLOSURE MAINTENANCE INACTIVE NON-HAZ. INSIGNIF. VOLUMES DECOMPOSABLE WASTES LANDFILLS	New WDRs	NA	100%	60%	30%	90%	May 12, 2004	TBD		Grove
JUNE 9, 2004 RB MEETING										
DUKE ENERGY SOUTH BAY POWER PLANT SAN DIEGO BAY	NPDES Permit Renewal	80%	80%	80%	50%	0%	June 9, 2004	No	NPDES Workplan FY 2001-02	Indus. Unit
NATIONAL STEEL AND SHIPBUILDING CO. SAN DIEGO BAY SEDIMENT CLEANUP	Adoption: CAO	NA	NA	NA	0%	0%	June 9, 2004	No		Carlisle
SOUTHWEST MARINE SAN DIEGO BAY SEDIMENT CLEANUP	Adoption: CAO	NA	NA	NA	0%	0%	June 9, 2004	No		Carlisle
SWEETWATER AUTHORITY LOWER SWEETWATER RIVER CHULA VISTA	NPDES Permit Renewal	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%	June 9, 2004	No	NPDES Workplan FY 2003-04	Indus. Unit
AUGUST 11, 2004 RB MEETING										
SO. CALIF. EDISON CO. SAN ONOFRE NUCLEAR POWER STATION UNIT NOS. 1, 2, and 3	NPDES Permit Renewal	0%	80%	80%	0%	0%	August 11, 2004	No	NPDES Workplan FY 2004-05	Phillips

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PENDING / UNSCHEDULED ACTIONS										
TOTAL MAX DAILY LOAD-RAINBOW CREEK POLLUTANT-NUTRIENTS	Cont. Hearing Basin Plan Amd.	NA	100%	100%	80%	50%				Carlisle
IBWC INTERNATIONAL WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT AND SO BAY OUTFALL	NPDES Permit Reissuance	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%			NPDES Workplan FY 2001-02	Hanson
IBWC INTERNATIONAL WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT AND SO BAY OUTFALL	Cease and Desist Order Hearing	NA	NA	NA	0%	0%				Hanson
POSEIDON / SAN DIEGO CO. WATER AUTHORITY DESALINATION PLANT CARLSBAD	New NPDES Permit	0%	80%	80%	0%	0%				Phillips
IRVINE RANCH WD DESALTER BRINE DISCH. TO SOCWA ALISO OCEAN OUTFALL	NPDES Permit	0%	100%	100%	0%	0%				POTW Unit
PROMENADE INC. PERMANENT DEWATERING DISCHARGE TO MISSION BAY	ACL Order	NA	NA	NA	100%	0%				Stewart
SAN PASQUAL ACADEMY	WDRs Revision	50%	50%	50%	0%	0%				Bryan Ott
VALLEY CENTER MWD - LIVE OAK RANCH	New WDRs	90%	90%	90%	90%	0%				POTW Unit
PAUMA VALLEY CSD PAUMA VALLEY TREATMENT PLANT	WDRs Revision	80%	25%	25%	0%	0%				POTW Unit
VISTA IRRIGATION DISTRICT-DAON CORP. RECLAMATION PROJECT	WDRs Recission	NA	NA	NA	0%	0%				POTW Unit

SANITARY SEWER OVERFLOW STATISTICS (Updated through November 30, 2003)

SEWAGE COLLECTION AGENCY	SYSTEM SIZE ^B		NUMBER OF SEWAGE SPILLS [LISTED BY FISCAL YEAR (FY) - JULY 1 THROUGH JUNE 30]						SPILLS PER 100 MILES (LISTED BY FY)				SPILL VOLUME 2003-04 ^A	
	Miles	MGD	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04 ^A	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	GAL	GAL/MG ^D
ORANGE COUNTY:														
EL TORO WD	55	2.2	0	3	1	2				0.0	5.5	1.8	1,288	4
EMERALD BAY SERVICE DISTRICT	6	0.1	1	0	0	0				16.7	0.0	0.0	0	0
IRVINE RANCH WD	36	2.0	1	0	0	0				2.8	0.0	0.0	0	0
LAGUNA BEACH, CITY OF	95	2.4	24	12	28	3				25.3	12.6	29.5	12	0.03
LOS ALISOS WD (absorbed by Irvine Ranch WD, January 2001)														
MOULTON NIGUEL WD	530	13.0	13	2	1	1				2.5	0.4	0.2	1,800	1
SAN CLEMENTE, CITY OF	179	4.5	9	6	7	2				5.0	3.3	3.9	16,476	24
SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, CITY OF	100	3.4	1	0	0	0				1.0	0.0	0.0	0	0
SANTA MARGARITA WD	546	10.7	11	12	4	2				2.0	2.2	0.7	2,879	1.8
SOUTH COAST CWD	132	4.0	12	5	8	4				9.1	3.8	6.1	1,108	1.8
TRABUCO CANYON WD	43	0.7	0	0	0	1				0.0	0.0	0.0	5	0.05
RIVERSIDE COUNTY:														
EASTERN MWD	446	10.0	6	1	3	2				1.3	0.2	0.7	7,100	4.63
ELSINORE VALLEY MWD	80	2.0	1	0	0	0				1.3	0.0	0.0	0	0
MURRIETA MWD (included with Eastern MWD)														
RANCHO CA WD	71	2.9	0	2	0	0				0.0	2.8	0.0	0	0
SAN DIEGO COUNTY:														
BUENA SANITARY DISTRICT	84	1.9	0	0	2	0				0.0	0.0	2.4	0	0
CARLSBAD MWD	214	7.2	12	15	6	3				5.6	7.0	2.8	180	0.16
CHULA VISTA, CITY OF	400	16.0	7	6	3	2				1.8	1.5	0.8	2,800	1.1
CORONADO, CITY OF	53	3.8	11	5	2	0				20.8	9.4	3.8	0	0
DEL MAR, CITY OF	30	1.1	2	2	7	0				6.7	6.7	23.4	0	0
EL CAJON, CITY OF	198	9.1	3	2	3	0				1.5	1.0	1.5	0	0
ENCINITAS, CITY OF	118	4.1	4	2	6	0				3.4	1.7	5.1	0	0
ESCONDIDO, CITY OF	350	10.8	10	14	3	1				2.9	4.0	0.9	120	0.07
FAIRBANKS RANCH COMM SERV DIST	15	0.2	0	0	0	0				0.0	0.0	0.0	0	0
FALL BROOK PUBLIC UTILITY DIST ^C	72	2.0	27	17	22	1				37.5	23.6	30.6	3,000	10
IMPERIAL BEACH, CITY OF	84	2.2	9	1	14	0				10.7	1.2	16.7	0	0
LA MESA, CITY OF	155	5.8	3	12	3	0				1.9	7.7	1.9	0	0
LEMON GROVE, CITY OF	69	2.4	3	9	4	1				4.3	13.0	5.8	240	0.6

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	Miles	MGD	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04 ^A	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	GAL	GAL/MG ^D
SAN DIEGO COUNTY (continued):											
LEUCADIA CWD	185	4.2	5	5	6	1	2.7	2.7	3.2	500	0.8
NATIONAL CITY, CITY OF	97	5.1	0	0	1	1	0.0	0.0	1.0	3,600	5
OCEANSIDE, CITY OF, WTR UTIL DEP	446	13.0	19	17	23	8	4.3	3.8	5.2	1,949,207	980
OLIVENHAIN MWD	16	0.4	1	1	2	0	6.3	6.3	12.5	0	0
OTAY MWD	86	1.4	0	0	3	0	0.0	0.0	3.5	0	0
PADRE DAM MWD	150	5.1	1	4	3	1	0.7	2.7	2.0	50,000	64
PAUMA VALLEY COMM SERVICE DIS	8	0.7	0	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0	0
POWAY, CITY OF	170	4.0	6	1	5	0	3.5	0.6	2.9	0	0
RAINBOW MWD	54	0.7	3	2	2	0	5.5	3.7	3.7	0	0
RAMONA MWD	83	1.3	3	5	2	0	3.6	6.0	2.4	0	0
RANCHO SANTA FE COMM SERV DIST	52	0.4	1	1	1	0	1.9	1.9	1.9	0	0
SAN DIEGO CO, PUBLIC WORKS	380	11.0	1	4	11	2	0.3	1.1	2.9	2,800	1.7
SAN DIEGO, CITY OF, MWWD	2,894	170	316	226	193	36	10.9	7.8	6.7	858,693	33
SOLANA BEACH, CITY OF	52	1.2	3	2	1	0	5.8	3.8	1.9	0	0
USMC BASE, CAMP PENDLETON	194	3.1	35	18	23	4	18.1	9.3	11.9	96,350	206.5
US NAVY	123	4.0	26	24	12	2	21.2	19.5	9.8	2,650	4.3
VALLECITOS WD	202	6.1	4	4	5	0	2.0	2.0	2.5	0	0
VALLEY CENTER MWD	48	0.3	0	0	3	0	0.0	0.0	6.3	0	0
VISTA, CITY OF	198	6.5	5	4	4	3	2.5	2.0	2.0	13,375	14
WHISPERING PALMS COMM SERV DIS	17	0.3	0	1	1	0	0.0	5.8	5.8	0	0
REGION 9 TOTAL	9615	363	599	447	428	83				3,014,183	
AVERAGE ¹							6.2	4.6	4.5		54
STANDARD DEVIATION ²							7.9	5.1	7.1		147
MEDIAN ³							2.6	2.4	2.4		0

^A Includes available preliminary data for July 2003 - November 2003 and may not include all spills less than 1,000 gallons that did not enter surface waters or storm drains during this period.

^B As of June 2003.

^C Does not include 11 SSOs in 2000-2001 which occurred from private property but are the responsibility of the Fallbrook PUD according to its own existing policies at the time.

^D Volume of spills for the period in gallons divided by the amount conveyed for the period in million gallons

¹ The average is the sum of all values divided by the number of values.

² In a normally distributed set of values, 68% of the values are within one standard deviation either above or below the average value.

³ The median is the middle value in a set; half the values are above the median, and half are below the median.



Winston H. Hickox
Secretary for
Environmental
Protection

California Regional Water Quality ATTACHMENT B-7

San Diego Region

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Gray Davis
Governor

STAFF WORKSHOP AGENDA

- Presentation of NASSCO and Southwest Marine Technical Report
- Cleanup and Abatement Order Scoping Meeting

November 14, 2003 - 9:00 am to 4:30 pm
Regional Board Office – Board Room

-
1. Introduction
(Craig Carlisle, RWQCB) [9:00-9:15]
 2. Background and Project Schedule
(Tom Alo, RWQCB) – [9:15-9:40]
 3. Overview of Cleanup and Abatement Orders
(Tom Alo, RWQCB) – [9:40-10:00]
 4. Presentation of Technical Report
(Tom Ginn & Dreas Nielsen, Exponent)
 - Historical Site Conditions [10:00-10:15]
 - Sediment Chemistry [10:15-10:45]
 - <10-MIN BREAK> [10:45-10:55]
 - Aquatic Life Risk Assessment [10:55-11:35]
 - Aquatic-Dependent Wildlife Risk Assessment [11:35-12:05]
 - Human Health Risk Assessment [12:05-12:35]
 - <BREAK FOR LUNCH> [12:35-1:35]
 - Integrated Assessment of Beneficial Uses [1:35-2:05]
 - Feasibility Study [2:05-3:05]

California Environmental Protection Agency

The energy challenge facing California is real. Every Californian needs to take immediate action to reduce energy consumption. For a list of simple ways you can reduce demand and cut your energy costs, see our Web-site at <http://www.swrcb.ca.gov>.

Recycled Paper



5. San Diego Bay Council Comments [3:05-3:35]
<10-MIN BREAK> [3:35-3:45]
6. Comments from Other Interested Parties [3:45-4:30]
7. Closing
(Craig Carlisle, RWQCB)

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AND NOW IT'S JUNK

County must get rid of more than 150,000 tons of debris

By Kathryn Balint

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

November 16, 2003

Trash officials countywide are figuring out how to dispose of the more than 150,000 tons of rubble and debris the wildfires left behind.

Ashes from destroyed houses will be buried at local landfills. So will the 2,500 wooden utility poles and more than 1,000 guardrail posts that were damaged in the fires.

Very little fire debris has been hauled in so far, but landfill operators say they are bracing for an influx over the months to come as fire victims begin rebuilding. Just how much debris may be headed to the landfills, however, is difficult to estimate.

"You hear some of the stories about how hot this fire got, and what was able to melt," said Neil Mohr, general manager of San Diego Landfill Systems, which operates landfills near Santee, Chula Vista and in Ramona. "That's why we're not sure we're going to see a large volume of waste, just because the fire burned so hot."

The county estimates the 3,000 burned-up structures in unincorporated areas will generate about 102,000 tons of debris. Yet that number is "very preliminary" and based on a Federal Emergency Management Agency estimate of 34 tons of debris for each home that was destroyed, county recycling coordinator Wayne Williams cautioned. The estimates don't include debris from damaged, but still standing, homes.

The city of San Diego's trash estimates are much higher. The city estimates the 327 destroyed homes and the 61 homes that were damaged in Scripps Ranch and Tierrasanta alone will generate 52,000 tons of waste.

Again, as with the county's estimates, these represent just a "ballpark analysis," said Stephen Greal, the acting assistant deputy director of the city's Environmental Services Department.

The state has relieved the city and county of its mandate to recycle 50 percent of all waste, at least when it comes to dealing with the fire debris.



K.C. ALFRED / Union-Tribune

City worker Mike Granata removes metal from the site of a destroyed home last week on Fairbrook Road in Scripps Ranch. Trash officials countywide are figuring out how to dispose of the more than 150,000 tons of rubble and debris the wildfires left behind.

Still, trash officials countywide said they want to recycle as much as they can to save precious space at the landfills, and they have begun taking steps to do so.

"Anything that ends up in a landfill is a big concern of ours," Williams said. "We don't want the recyclable material to end up in a landfill."

The city of San Diego estimates one-third of the fire debris can be recycled.

Concrete and bricks from the foundations of homes, driveways, sidewalks and fireplaces make up the bulk of the debris. City and county officials are directing contractors and homeowners to take concrete and bricks to recycling facilities that grind them into material for building roads.

Metal that survived the fire can be melted down and reused. The city of San Diego has placed bins in burned-over areas, where homeowners can toss everything from bedsprings to bicycles.

The city has already hauled 70 tons of metal, most of it burned beyond recognition, to the Miramar Landfill, where it is piled 6 feet high. City recycling specialist John Theroux said the metal will be taken to a recycler once it is all collected.

Landscaping plants that were burned in the fire will be ground up at the Miramar Landfill for use as mulch, Theroux said.

One of the fire's most abundant byproducts, ash, will be buried at the Miramar, Otay, Sycamore Canyon and Ramona landfills. It must be wetted down and covered while being hauled to a landfill.

Televisions, computers, paint cans and other electronic or household hazardous waste are being collected at the curbside in fire-damaged areas of San Diego.

In other actions around the area, the county's Environmental Health Department is sponsoring one-day events to collect electronic waste and household hazard waste from residents of unincorporated areas. The first was held yesterday at Bethel Christian Assembly in Alpine.

The other two collection events will be held next weekend, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at Valley Center & Pauma Unified School District Office, 28751 Cole Grade Road, in Valley Center and at the County of San Diego Road Station, 1524 North Highway 78, in Julian. Residents of unincorporated areas not affected by the fire are also welcome to drop off their waste at these events.

Among the largest fire-damaged items being disposed of in a landfill: San Diego Gas & Electric Company's 2,500 utility poles. SDG&E has placed 38 bins in the backcountry to collect them. From the bins, they'll be hauled to the Otay Landfill near Chula Vista for disposal, SDG&E spokeswoman Anne Silva said.

Ordinarily, SDG&E would find a secondary user for the poles, Silva said. In this case, though, they were charred beyond the point of safety for further use, she said.

That wood also has been treated with chemicals to prevent rot and termite infestations so it is not suitable for mulch, landfill manager Mohr said.

To provide financial relief, San Diego Landfill Systems has reduced disposal fees for fire-related debris from \$48 a ton to \$20.

San Diego's Environmental Services Department is preparing a report for the City Council on the impact of reducing, or eliminating, trash disposal fees for fire debris.

Public Assistance

Disaster Guidance

Attachment E

No. 1

FEMA-1498-DR-CA

Debris Eligibility

1. Collection and disposal of hazardous waste from burn sites (including private property) by an eligible applicant is eligible for FEMA reimbursement.
2. The demolition of buildings on private property that have been condemned and constitute an immediate threat to the safety of the general public may be eligible for funding; however, the removal of the debris is not eligible, unless it contains hazardous materials. Debris removal in this case is limited to only that material which is hazardous, and should be separated during demolition to avoid contamination of surrounding debris. (see Number 1 above).
3. The collection and disposal of debris on the public right-of-way and/or the operation of centrally located debris drop-off locations on public property made available to the general public is eligible for FEMA reimbursement. Reasonable project management and related administration costs (including public notices, meetings, etc.) associated with a coordinated effort to remove debris from the public right-of-way is eligible for FEMA reimbursement. Eligible applicants must submit the coordinated plan, including estimates for project management and administrative costs, to the OES/FEMA PAO for prior approval, through the OES/FEMA PAC.
4. FEMA may reimburse an eligible applicant for (1) the dewatering of swimming pools that constitute a threat to the health and safety of the general public, and (2) construction of a temporary protection fence around the pool, or (3) with prior approval from FEMA, other methods as proposed by eligible applicants.
5. The removal of trees damaged by fire is not eligible for FEMA funding with the exception of trees in imminent danger of falling on a public right-of-way. Eligible applicants should identify those trees that threaten public right-of-way and arrange, through the OES/FEMA PAC, for an eligibility review prior to removal.
6. FEMA may reimburse an eligible applicant for limited testing of ash by geographical area for the purpose of establishing a threat to the health and safety of the general public.
7. The removal of fire related debris from private property by a public entity is generally not considered eligible work by FEMA (with the exception of hazardous materials, see Number 1 above). 44 CFR Section 206.224 contains criteria that must be met in order to be considered for eligibility. However, as the primary responsibility for the removal of debris from private property rests with the property owner who may have numerous resources available to them including, insurance proceeds, SBA monies, IHP monies, volunteers to remove debris from their property to the public right-of-way, the case for eligibility under Section 206.224 is difficult to make, and can only be made on a case by case basis. OES/FEMA PACs should notify the OES/FEMA PAO when eligible applicants are contemplating a coordinated approach for further guidance.

OES Concurrence

FEMA Concurrence

Oakland learned from losses in '91

City was forced to make fire safety a top priority

By Roger M. Showley

STAFF WRITER

November 16, 2003

OAKLAND – Just over 12 years ago, one of California's deadliest wildfires raced out of the hills above San Francisco Bay and into the lives of thousands.

From a small blaze that seemed contained the day before, the fire erupted out of control on a Sunday in October, as did San Diego County's recent wildfires. Propelled by strong, hot winds from the east and a ready-made tinderbox of brush and pine needles, the fire moved into expensive neighborhoods with views across the bay.

Over a four-day period, the Oakland Hills fire killed 25 people and devoured more than 3,200 homes, some at the rate of one every 11 seconds. Legions of firefighters were helpless as the flames advanced into the hillside neighborhoods. Narrow, windy roads in the fire's path hampered the firefighting efforts as well as residents' attempts to find safety.

The loss was pegged at \$1.6 billion, a figure likely to be topped by the San Diego County fires that cut through a much larger area: 376,000 acres vs. 1,500 acres.

City officials in Oakland and Berkeley and residents who endured the conflagration of Oct. 20-23, 1991, say the disaster offers lessons for those in San Diego County who are just beginning to assess fire losses and consider insurance policy changes.

On the official side, the San Francisco Bay Area communities learned to move faster, became more flexible and adopted reforms to make a massive rebuilding effort proceed smoothly. And fire safety, long overlooked as an issue, became a top priority.

"It brought about a whole new era of preparedness," said Henry Renteria, Oakland's director of emergency services.

However, today there are concerns that a round of budget tightening has again placed fire safety in jeopardy.

On the personal side, residents organized groups to deal with insurance companies, lobbied state and local government offices and coped with the emotions and family upheavals that go with a disastrous loss.

"One thing the people have to know in San Diego is they're going to be in shock and it's going to last a while," said Robert Wendlinger, an Oakland homeowner who spoke of his family's odyssey back to a normal life.

"Some people were unable to do the rebuilding process immediately," agreed Brooke Levin, an aide to Oakland's mayor at the time, Elihu Harris. "They had so much loss they couldn't cope. It became a long process. It became very stressful."

In 1992, with the memory of the fire less than a year old, voters in Oakland and Berkeley approved a pair of bond measures totaling \$105 million to buy new fire equipment and address problems left from the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

A similar response may be coming in the wake of the San Diego County fires, as officials talk of raising taxes to improve coordination among agencies and to buy new equipment, as well as exploring consolidation of some fire departments.

Oakland and Berkeley revamped emergency communications systems and notification procedures to obtain aid when needed. They also installed sirens to alert residents and businesses of any emergencies.

For their part, residents of the two cities have established permanent neighborhood emergency response teams that maintain preparedness kits at street-side storage bins and hold monthly fire drills.

"We're still not out of the woods, by any means," Renteria said. "We have huge canyons and forests and the potential exists there for another fire, and another will happen."

One lesson already taken from the Oakland Hills experience was evident as San Diego County's wildfires were brought under control.

"One-stop-shopping" assistance centers were set up in Scripps Ranch and other communities. They were modeled after a similar facility set up at a closed Safeway store in Oakland.

As is expected in San Diego, once the Oakland Hills fire was out and residents found temporary housing, the rebuilding effort began in earnest.

Within a year, residents filed nearly 4,000 insurance claims totaling \$1.4 billion. And within two years, the rebuilding effort generated 11,000 construction jobs.

Calvin Wong, director of Oakland's building department, said reviewing the hundreds of residential building permits took 50 percent more staff time than normal permit processing. But residents were not charged the usual fees, since the federal government reimbursed much of the city's administrative costs.

San Diego's governmental agencies are thinking of waiving or reducing a variety of fees but have yet to get any commitment from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to cover any revenue shortfall.

Once residents began seeking building permits, Wong said his staff realized that it needed to revise design controls while processing permits as rapidly as possible. The lesson for San Diego city and county, he said, is that this is time to make major reforms.

"Seize the opportunity to adopt policies to keep this from happening again," he said. "The first six months were spent in adjusting our standards."

One problem homeowners and the city faced early on was the lack of plans for homes that had been destroyed. Now, Wong said, the city saves all plans and is beginning to digitally scan and store them electronically for future reference.

In San Diego, city and county officials routinely discard home plans, meaning fire victims will have to reconstruct homes from memory and from incomplete evidence presented to their insurers.

In some Oakland neighborhoods, the new home plans were also reviewed by homeowner associations, which set design guidelines and govern standards established by the original subdivision developer.

But outside these planned developments, only underlying zoning and building codes applied. Despite post-fire design changes established in Oakland, officials said not enough was done to prevent residents from building oversized "dream homes" on their small hillside lots.

Today, many of the area's 1920s-vintage homes of 1,000 to 2,000 square feet have given way to houses two and three times larger. Dubbed "McMansions," some of the rebuilt homes block views of San Francisco Bay for many neighbors.

Still, the reconstruction boosted tax revenues.

Within six years, property values in the Oakland Hills, including those properties undamaged by the fire, had increased three times faster than the surrounding area.

Beyond rebuilding, officials said, there was a need to deal with the emotional trauma, not only of victims, but also that suffered by the entire community.

In Oakland, said former mayoral assistant Levin, victims were leaving her stacks of messages daily, "venting" about their losses and blaming officials for the poor response to the fire and the post-fire cleanup.

To refocus some of the raw emotions, Oakland held a celebration of heroes, honoring firefighters, residents and volunteers.

Later, Levin organized the "Firestorm Community Mural Project," consisting of 2,343 ceramic tiles decorated by residents and civic leaders that are displayed on walls at the Rockridge BART station. They carry messages, drawings and abstract images.

Although it was difficult to put the calamity behind them, Oakland and Berkeley residents learned that they could move past the fire.

An estimated 85 percent of the homes have been rebuilt. The fire is evident at some sites, where steps or concrete lead to a graded lot where a house once stood. But officials say that while much has been rebuilt, only 25 to 30 percent of the residents in 1991's fire area still live in the community.

"Some people took the (insurance) money and found a new home and were over and done with it," said Sue Piper, who lost her home in the Hiller Highlands area of Oakland.

Piper, her husband and three children rented a \$3,000-per-month house across from their burned-out lot and took 18 months to settle with their insurance company and six more months to complete their replacement house.

Earlier this month, she gathered several friends in her home to discuss the period of reconstruction for a visiting reporter. They all counseled patience and vigilance, adding they learned more by talking with other victims than from officials.

"You have six, seven or eight full-time jobs," Piper said, referring to the complexities of dealing with insurance companies, building officials, lenders and other institutions, "and then you need to keep your regular job and family together."

Keeping the family together at a time of crisis and displacement is perhaps one of the hardest jobs.

In the Piper household, husband Gordon impulsively went out and bought a \$5,000 big-screen TV and then

returned it. The couple decided to agree jointly on every major purchase from then on.

"You need to have a solid marriage at a time like that," she said. Some of her friends, she added, didn't make it, and ended up divorced.

While the fire spurred officials to rethink policies, at Oakland City Hall generous funding for firefighting has given way to a new era of budget constraints. A fireboat purchased from the bond funds has been idled, some firehouse staffing has been cut and brush management, a topic now under scrutiny in San Diego County, has been curtailed.

Voters in the Oakland Hills are voting on a \$65 annual parcel tax to reinstate the area's brush management program. For backers of the proposal, the San Diego fires came at an opportune time.

"What happened to you in Southern California," said Berkeley Fire Chief Reginald Garcia, who was on the front lines in Oakland in 1991, "has been a wake-up call for us here."

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